

Brief Articles

by Bryan Gibson

Don't Tamper with God's Word

Warnings abound in the both the Old and New Testaments about adding to, taking from, or changing God's word in any way (Deut. 4:1-2; 5:32; 12:32; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:5-6; Numbers 22:18; 24:13; Galatians 1:6-9; 3:15; 2 John 1:9; Revelation 22:18-19). Perhaps I'm not always as careful as I should be, but I sure am trying. Please let me know if I'm ever guilty, because I do fear the Lord, and I do fear what He will do to me if I mishandle His word.

Cutting Through the Confusion

"God is NOT the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33), and yet we have a lot of it in the religious world. If God's not responsible, it must be man. The only way I know to cut through all the confusion is to go back to "what you heard from the beginning" (1 John 2:24), back to God's simple plan in the New Testament, and then follow it very carefully. It CAN be done, in fact, it MUST be done.

Return to the Lord, Just Like This Brother

We lost a beloved brother this morning (3/4/14), Billy Cross. Billy was away from the Lord for many years, but in 2004 he came back and from everything we could tell, remained faithful until his passing this morning. Please, if you're reading this and YOU'VE become unfaithful to the Lord, do what Billy did. It's not too late, not yet anyway, so please don't wait until it IS too late. "Return to Me, and I will return to you" (Malachi 3:7).

"Here's Your Sign!"

Could we please get someone, anyone to hold up an Acts 2:38 sign at a football game? Just to add some balance to all the John 3:16 signs. Acts 22:16 would be nice, too.

Instrumental Music: From Heaven or From Men?

The elders of the Hunter Hills church of Christ, in Prattville, AL, are considering adding instruments of music to their worship assemblies. Their reasoning? From a letter they sent to their members: "We want our members to know that all the

shepherds agree that scripture does not prohibit the use of instrumental music in our assembly.”

Okay, let's think through that for just a minute. What if we decided to include everything the Scriptures did not specifically forbid? Can you imagine the chaos that would ensue?

The fact of the matter is that we must abide within the doctrine of Christ (1 John 2:24; 2 John 1:9), which means that we cannot add to, take from, or change in any way what is revealed in the New Testament (Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 3:15; 1:6-9). In other words, we are limited to what is WRITTEN, and there is no authority for such found in what is written (see especially Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

Why not be like Jesus, who was so very careful to speak only what the Father gave him to speak (John 7:14-18; 8:26-29, 40; 12:47-50; 14:24; 17:8, 14). Some may call it legalistic, but the truth is, we are very much Christ-like when we teach only what God has revealed.

The Proper Approach to Authority

You can't beat this approach to authority, because it's the same one Jesus used.

“My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me...If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks His own glory...” (John 7:14, 17-18).

“I do nothing of Myself; but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things” (John 8:28).

“For I not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak...whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (John 12:49-50).

“The word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me” (John 14:24).

“For I have given to them the words which You have given Me...” (John 17:8).

Conclusion: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God...” (1 Peter 4:11). Jesus did, and so should we.

A Poor and Contrite Heart

We may look at two Christians and judge one to be strong, and the other struggling. God's assessment may be just the opposite, because the "struggling Christian" may have a poor and contrite heart, whereas the "strong" one does not. The "struggling Christian" may not be doing as much good as the "strong" one, and presently he may even have a greater struggle with sin, but he knows his condition; he takes correction well; he's always willing to repent; he humbly seeks forgiveness; and he strives diligently to get better every day. And that's more than can be said for some "strong" Christians we know.

"But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2).

"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit..." (Isaiah 57:15).

"The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit" (Psalms 34:18).

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

Secret Bible Studies

Brethren, be very wary of those who like to conduct private Bible studies (the kind they had just as soon the elders not know about, and the kind where seasoned Bible students are rarely invited). This is the very setting that often leads to the spread of false doctrine. All this secret stuff runs completely counter to Paul's approach: "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2).

Local Churches in the New Testament—Examples for Us to Follow Today?

You better believe it, and here's why:

They operated under the direction of the apostles (the ambassadors of the King), and those on whom the apostles laid their hands to impart the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18).

They were taught from the beginning to continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, doctrine which obviously came from the Lord (Acts 2:42).

The same thing was taught in every church (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17), and what they were taught were the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

What they did, then, in obedience to the Lord is what we must do today.

Consider carefully what Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe” (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7). Because they were following the Lord, they became examples—not just to those of their own generation, but also to us today.

This Man Got It

“For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (Luke 7:8).

This centurion had a pretty good grasp of authority, don't you think?

No Better Source

Preach the word! (2 Timothy 4:2)—even when you preach on marriage, childrearing, and anything else to do with the family. Some preachers who quote Scripture regularly on other subjects tend to get away from Scripture on this subject. It is indeed a shame when we quote the so-called experts more than we quote God. And please don't think the Bible has little to say about family relations. The Bible is filled with principles that relate to the marriage relationship, childrearing, and other family-related matters. Once again—preach the word!

On Improving Worship

I know I can improve when it comes to my public worship of God (in the assembly). I can always be more attentive, more reverent, more thankful, and more joyful. I can improve my understanding of God, and therefore my worship of God. What I cannot improve is God's plan for worship, a plan which includes not only the specific activities, but the manner in which they should be done. If my worship is lacking, I just need to do a better job of following His plan. I'm pleading with my brethren to join me in this same approach, and to stop introducing into our worship things for which we have no CLEAR authority from Christ (Colossians 2:8-23; 3:17). It doesn't matter how much good you think these things will do—draw us closer together,

produce more emotion, etc. God's way is right, and it is best—anything else is an insult to Him.

Passionless Brethren?

Disappointed in your brethren? Think they're not passionate enough, that they don't love as much as they should? Seems like a lot of that going around, with all the popular writing about the radical, passionate Christian. Tread lightly, because you're talking about things you don't really know for sure. You don't follow them to work every day. You don't see what all they may be doing in their homes. You don't know how many people they may have reached out to with the gospel. You don't know how many deeds of kindness they may have done. Don't confuse their quietness (1 Thessalonians 4:11) with lack of zeal. If your assessment IS correct, criticizing them for strict adherence to truth on certain matters is not the way to stir them to action. Commend them for that, and then let's encourage each other to obey the truth in all things. "Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you" (Acts 3:22). "Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). "For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things" (2 Corinthians 2:9). "...bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The Lord Opened Her Heart

Concerning Lydia, Acts 16:14 says, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." The text doesn't specifically say how the Lord did that. But what cause do we KNOW was present that had the power to open her heart? The gospel of Jesus Christ, the same gospel said to be "the power of God to salvation" (Romans 1:16). Remember, Paul had already been speaking to the group of women gathered by the river, and Lydia was listening (Acts 16:13). If you still find it hard to believe the gospel opened her heart, read carefully the other conversions in the Book of Acts. Was it not the gospel that opened their hearts?

“Same Ole, Same Ole”

“For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe”
(Philippians 3:1).

Basic Bible truths should not be tedious (to the teacher or the hearers/readers), because if neglected for very long, they won't be so basic anymore. And, they provide a wonderful safeguard against error.

Implication: A Vital Part of Bible Teaching

Some say that we can't bind what is implied in the Scriptures, that our inferences cannot be trusted. They will have to take up their argument with Jesus, because He made it clear to the Jews that they should have seen (inferred) what was implied in certain Old Testament passages. “The two shall become one flesh” carried a strong implication about divorce (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-6). “I Am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” spoken after these men were dead, implied life after death (Exodus 3:6; Matthew 22:31-32). “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” implied that the Christ was much more than David's son (Psalms 110:1; Matthew 22:41-46). Likewise, the New Testament Scriptures are filled with implications, and we best get busy finding them. Yes, it requires careful, diligent study, but that's what the Lord intended in the first place.

Patternless Religion?

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and **not according to Christ**” (Colossians 2:8).

If there is no pattern in the New Testament, how can you know if a teaching or practice is “according to Christ” or not? How can you know if it's “from heaven or from men” (Matthew 21:25)? There has to be some objective way to tell the difference.

All Truth

According to the New Testament, Christians in the first century could believe the truth, know the truth, and walk in the truth (1 Timothy 4:3; 1 John 2:21; 3 John 1:3-4). It doesn't sound like they were missing anything only made available to future generations. The truth is, they were given “all things that pertain to life and

godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Epaphras even prayed for his brethren that they “may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Colossians 4:12). Why pray that if all of His will had not been revealed? Admittedly, it was not until near the end of the first century that the New Testament was completely written, but they at least had the will of God in oral form. Was there any difference between what the apostles and prophets preached by inspiration and what they wrote by inspiration?

Some Things Won't Ever Be Fixed

“What is crooked cannot be made straight...” (Eccl. 1:15). That's life “under the sun.” The *Encyclopedia of World Problems* is a three volume work, with over 3000 pages, dealing with over 12,000 problems. No matter how much ingenuity is applied to solving them, most will still be a problem when this world is no more. So, let's be careful how we budget our time and our resources (Ephesians 5:16). “Seek **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). Labor “for the food which endures to everlasting life” (John 6:27). Choose the “good part, which will not be taken away” (Luke 10:42). “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:12). “Preach the word!” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Slow Down, and Be Sure

Tabloid journalism has now become the norm, and it may be affecting those of us who preach the gospel. We're so eager to break something new, to turn the world upside down that we sometimes forget to check the facts. Let's slow down, study thoroughly, and then preach only that which we can prove to be true. And if I'm guilty, please tell me, and tell me quickly.

The Thief on the Cross

“But what about the thief on the cross?” In other words, if Jesus saved the thief without baptism, why couldn't He do the same for us? In response to that question, though, let's ask another one. “But what about the 3000 souls on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-41), and what about the Samaritans (Acts 8:12-13), the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:26-40), Saul (Acts 9:18; 22:16), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:48), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-34), Crispus and the other Corinthians (Acts 18:8), and the twelve men in Ephesus (Acts 19:5)?” These people were all baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins, and they

did so in obedience to the will of Christ, a will which came into effect **after** the death of Christ (Hebrews 9:15-17).

The Aim of Grace

Grace is not an end in itself. It has an aim, and that aim is produce obedience, to change the people who receive it—from walking in sin to walking in newness of life (Romans 6:4); from being slaves of sin to being slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:15-23); from living for self to living for Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Obedience, then, in no way detracts from the grace of God; instead it brings it into clearer light for all to see. Barnabas “saw” the grace of God when he observed the new converts in Antioch (Acts 11:23); let's make sure others can see it in us, too.

“Quiet, Please”

What God DID say: “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life” (1 Thess. 4:11, NIV).

What God DID NOT say: Make it your ambition to be seen by men, to be obnoxious, to always be heard, to always get the last word. Make it your ambition to always get your own way. Make it your ambition to defy authority—civil and religious. Make it your ambition to know all you can about your friends, neighbors, and brethren in Christ. Make it your ambition to be a drama king or queen. Make it your ambition to be at the center of as many personal feuds as possible.

Boasting About Baptism?

I've witnessed many people obey the commandment to be baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). I've NEVER heard anyone say, after coming up from the water, “Hey everyone, look what I did.” They clearly understood that despite the necessity of obedience, this was still a gift from God.

Partner Up

In religious service, sincerity alone is not enough. It needs a partner, and that partner is truth. “Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and truth” (Joshua 24:14). “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:8).

An Extreme View of God's Sovereignty

Gordon Clark, in *Religion, Reason, and Revelation*, p. 221: "If a man gets drunk and shoots his family, it was the will of God that he should do it."

A shocking statement indeed, but that's the logical conclusion to the Calvinistic view of God's sovereignty.

God's sovereignty and man's free will. Why put them at odds with each other, when clearly the Scriptures do not? (Genesis 50:19-20; Isaiah 10:5-19; Acts 4:23-30).

By the way, the BALANCE presented in the above passages, we need more of that in our teaching. Just another reason to heed this admonition: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

The Harmful Influence of Calvinism

In the early 1800's, after being steeped in Calvinism and then studying his way out of it, "Raccoon" John Smith had this to say: "Calvinism is among the heaviest clogs on Christianity in the world. It is a dark mountain between heaven and earth, and is amongst the most discouraging hindrances to sinners from seeking the kingdom of God, and engenders bondage and gloominess in the saints. Its influence is felt throughout the Christian world, even where it is least suspected" (Quoted by Cherrill Schmid, "The Impact of Calvinism on the Restorers," *Guardian of Truth*, Volume 30, Number 1 (January 2, 1986), p. 24).

Prudence

"Not gonna do it, wouldn't be prudent"—some may remember comedians using that line to impersonate President George H. Bush. Here are some things it wouldn't be prudent for me to do. Wouldn't be prudent to lose my cool, even when folks insult me (Prov. 12:16). Wouldn't be prudent to spend more time talking than listening (Prov. 12:23; 10:19). Wouldn't be prudent, especially in religious matters, to believe everything I hear—without checking to make sure it's the truth (Prov. 14:8, 15; Acts 17:11; Eph. 5:17; 1 John 4:1). Wouldn't be prudent to close my ears to rebuke and correction, because I'll just keep making the same mistakes over and over again (Prov. 15:5, 32). Wouldn't be prudent to ignore spiritual red flags—places, people, situations that might endanger my soul (Prov. 22:3). Wouldn't be prudent for me to take prudence too far, to be so careful that I never get anything done (Eccl. 11:4).

How to Cause Unrest and Division Among Your Brethren

Keep your finger on the pulse of society. Know what people love to hear, and preach it. Don't be content to preach what you know for certain is the truth. If you know it will have a great impact, preach it anyway, regardless of the certainty of your conclusions. Be bold; be daring; push the envelope; be ever conscious of preaching something new. Embrace all the positive feedback, and reject the negative. Tell yourself that you're doing too much good for anyone to dare criticize you.

Social Media

The prevalence of social media has made it easier than ever to compare ourselves to others. We see what others are thinking, what they're wearing, what they enjoy doing, what seemingly matters the most to them. This presents a great temptation to Christians—to compare ourselves to others rather than to Christ. We tend to feel secure as long as our standards exceed those of the people we see on these various social media outlets (or even in “real” life). Big mistake. The holiness to which God calls us through His word (1 Peter 1:15-16), in thought, in speech, in doctrine, in dress, in temperament, etc.—that's our measuring stick, and so let's get our Bibles open and get busy measuring up to the divine standard.

Child Rearing: What Matters Most

Our heavenly Father is concerned about our physical well-being, but He puts far more emphasis on our spiritual well-being. Many of us have been blessed far beyond our needs, but that's really all He promises—the basic necessities of life (Matthew 6:11, 25; 1 Timothy 6:8). Spiritual blessings—now that's a completely different matter. He lavishes those upon us (Ephesians 1:3-14), and included among those is a vast storehouse of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:1-3). Bottom line, He's far more concerned with preparing us for eternal life than making us comfortable in this life. So fathers and mothers, when it comes to our own children, let's not get so caught up in providing them things (“stuff”), that we neglect their spiritual training. If we DON'T bring our children up in the “training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4), if we DON'T prepare them for eternity, we have failed, no matter how much we may give them materially, and no matter how successful they may become in other endeavors.

A Husband's Resolution to His Wife

I will love you—even through the most difficult times (“for better or for WORSE”). Christ doesn’t abandon His bride during these times (Romans 8:35-39), and I won’t abandon you. If we face financial difficulties, I will still love you, even if you’re the cause of them. If you become overweight, I will still love you. If you become very ill and I have to spend all my time taking you to the doctor, I will still love you. If you become an invalid and can no longer do anything for me, I will still love you. God joined us together and I intend to keep it that way.

Honor God

“Honor your father and mother” (Ephesians 6:2), yes, but first and foremost, honor God. Honor God by speaking to others about Him (Acts 4:18-20), by speaking only what He has revealed (John 7:14, 16-18; 8:28; 12:49-50; 14:24; 17:8), by obeying everything He commands (Matthew 28:20; Acts 3:22), by not defiling the temple in which He dwells (1 Corinthians 6:13-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8), by honoring others before yourself (Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3), by honoring those in authority (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17), by giving special honor to those who honor Him (Psalms 15:4; Philippians 2:29-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17), by avoiding things that even appear dishonorable (2 Corinthians 8:16-21); by confessing your sin—by saying that He is right and you are wrong (Joshua 7:19).

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor?” (Malachi 1:6).

What a Fellowship

“O Father, Thou spared not Thy Son, but bought us with His blood; from many nations, made thou one united brotherhood. Where'er we gather in His name, a common love we share, at home, in distant land, the same Communion everywhere” (*Our Fellowship*, verse 2).

We will sing this song tonight at the graduation party for Leah Gibson and Stone Counsell. Very soon, both families will experience the “empty nest,” with our children scattered in different directions. We will not be in the same physical location, but we will be joined together spiritually—in the greatest fellowship of all.

Don't Wait to Serve the Lord

Please don't wait until your children are grown to begin diligently serving the Lord. If you do, it may be too late—not for your own salvation, but potentially for theirs. Begin TODAY, first and foremost for His sake, but also for theirs.

“Let It Go”

All together now, “Let it go! Let it go!” That might work for some things, but not for sin. One thing's for sure, Ezra and other leaders didn't “let it go.” It took them THREE MONTHS to confront ALL the men who were in sin and urge them to repent (Ezra 10:14-17). Might just be a lesson in there for us today.

Hard-Headed Brethren

Jim Owens served the Prattmont Church of Christ as an elder for many years. He stepped down a few years ago to take care of his ailing wife. I've learned a lot from him, including this jewel. He said every church needs at least one hard head in its midst, at least one man who will openly question every new proposal, even when everyone else seems convinced we have the authority to do it. Nothing wrong with coming up with new ways to do what God has authorized, but don't get upset when hard head asks some hard questions. He just wants to be sure God approves, and I'm sure you want that, too.

A Man's Stand

My father, who passed away in 2007, had very little exposure to the truth in his early years and didn't become a Christian until he was in his 20s. A few years after his conversion, he and my mother, along with several other families, became very disturbed over the practices of their local church. Things were being done for which there was no authority in the New Testament, and when efforts to resolve their differences with the other brethren failed, they decided to begin a new congregation—one dedicated to following the New Testament pattern. What other churches around them were doing mattered none to them; they were determined to go back to “the beginning” (1 John 2:24) for everything they did. Thanks to him and a number of other fine Christians, that church has remained firm in that commitment to this day. Talk to those involved in this effort, and they will all tell you that had it not been for my father's decisive stand, many more souls may have been lost. Fathers, the courage to stand for the truth is a great legacy to leave your children.

The Right Kind of Love

Those whose love I appreciate the most are those who have the utmost concern for doctrinal purity. There's nothing blind about their love; in fact, because they love and know the truth, their love is accompanied by knowledge and discernment (Philippians 1:9), and that's the kind I need the most.

Older Preachers

I guess I'm slowly transitioning into that older preacher stage, but there are still a number of faithful preachers around much older than I. When they talk, I listen intently; and when they write, I read carefully. I listen and read with the same filter the Bereans used (Acts 17:11), but I do pay close attention. Let's face it—they're ahead of me in knowledge, wisdom, and experience, so I would be foolish to not reap the benefits. Let me encourage, then, all my "younger" brethren to do the same. And don't get put off by the numerous warnings (even the forceful ones) you hear from them. Deviations from the truth some may consider harmless, or "striving about words to no profit" (2 Timothy 2:14), they see in a different light, because they've been around long enough to see where it leads.

"Wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding" (Job 12:12).

Playing Down to the Competition

Coaches fret over this very thing, especially when playing an over-matched opponent. And with good reason, because teams often do play down to the competition, rather than up to the standard established for them. Granted, they may still win, because they manage to play just a little bit better than the opponent. The same thing happens in the spiritual realm. Rather than "playing" up to the standard established for us, we play down to the world. As long as we're just a little bit better than the world, we consider it a victory. Sorry, but that's not the way it works in the spiritual realm.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Romans 12:2).

"Be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Christ in Me

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..." (Galatians 2:20).

For Christ to live in me (Galatians 2:20), His words must live in me (John 15:7).

If His words live in me, His mind lives in me (Philippians 2:5).

If His mind lives in me, “every good thing” lives in me (Philemon 1:6).

If every good thing lives in me, sin cannot (1 John 3:6-9).

Bottom line: If His words and His mind live in me; and every good thing found in Him is found in me, my life will look just like His life (1 John 2:6).

Loving When They Can't Love You Back

Jesus said, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because THEY CANNOT REPAY YOU; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:12-14).

It's tough to love someone when you know you'll receive little or nothing in return, when they can't “repay you.” For the last several years, I've watched my father-in-law, Thomas May, care for his dear wife, Neal, who suffers from Alzheimer's. Because this disease has taken such a toll on her mind, she couldn't offer much at all in return. Day after day after day he did for her when she could not do for him. He finally reached a point when he could no longer care for her at home, and so last week he had to make the difficult decision to put her in the nursing home. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describes the behavior of love. Thank you, Thomas May, for showing me exactly what that passage means. And thank you, God, for teaching him that kind of love.

Togetherness in the Lord

“Workers TOGETHER with Him” (2 Cor. 6:1).

“Joined TOGETHER in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10).

“Joined and knit TOGETHER by what every joint supplies” (Eph. 4:16).

“With one mind striving TOGETHER for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27).

“Knit TOGETHER in love” (Col. 2:2).

Brethren who are TOGETHER in heart, purpose, and conviction should naturally look forward to the opportunity to actually meet TOGETHER (1 Cor. 14:23).

And when we do assemble, when we come TOGETHER to worship God, it brings us even closer TOGETHER. “When we meet in sweet communion where the feast divine is spread; hearts are brought in closer union while partaking of the bread.”

So, brethren, we may be TOGETHER now, but I'm looking forward to Sunday when we can be TOGETHER in the same place. See you there!

Not the Right Fit

Years ago, Conway Twitty had a hit song called, "Tight Fittin' Jeans." One line in the song says, "I love that lady wearing tight fittin' jeans." I think we all know WHY he "loved" that lady. Ladies, you're making a big mistake wearing them. You're attracting the wrong kind of attention, and the wrong kind of man. Put on Christ (Romans 13:13-14), and then put on something that reflects His values.

Forget Me Not

Don't forget about this one:

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Who Really Gets It?

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him SHOW by good CONDUCT that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

The one who really "gets it" is the one who understands how to apply it.

The Power of Addiction

Have you seen the commercial where a guy says, "When I crave a smoke, that's ALL I crave"? It's hard to describe the nature of addiction much better than that. Don't be "brought under the power" of ANYTHING (1 Cor. 6:12), because pretty soon, that's ALL you'll be able to think about.

Beautiful Feet

"How beautiful are the feet of those who...develop cures for terminal diseases?" Nope. "How beautiful are the feet of those who...create the latest technological advance?" Nope. "How beautiful are the feet of those who...feed the hungry?" Nope. These people are all doing wonderful things, but NO ONE is doing ANYTHING more important than preaching the gospel. It is the greatest work, fulfilling the greatest need, and offering the greatest hope. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace..." (Romans 10:15).

One in Doctrine

Jesus and the Father are one in DOCTRINE. Jesus affirmed over and over again that what He taught came from His Father, that His words were the Father's words (John 7:14-18; 8:26-29,

40; 12:47-50; 14:24; 17:8, 14). That being the case, for us to be one in them (Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-21), we must teach only what Jesus taught. And that's exactly what these passages plainly state: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 1:9). "Therefore, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father" (1 John 2:24). There's no getting around it—what we teach must be ONE with what Jesus taught.

Demetrius (Not the Silversmith)

"Demetrius has a good testimony from ALL, and from the TRUTH itself" (3 John 1:12).

If Demetrius can do it, so can we.

The Difference Between Fear and Faith

"All the men of Israel, when they saw the man (Goliath), FLED FROM him and were dreadfully afraid" (1 Samuel 17:24).

"David hurried and RAN TOWARD the army to meet the Philistine (Goliath) (1 Samuel 17:48).

David's explanation: "Is there not a cause?" (1 Samuel 17:29).

Contending earnestly for the gospel (Jude 1:3)—that's OUR cause. We can either run toward it or run from it. It's the difference between fear and faith.

What Do You Really Know About the Prattmont Church of Christ?

I don't know what you may have HEARD about us, but please don't trust what OTHERS have said. Come and see for YOURSELF. What I believe you will see is a very determined effort to do everything according to the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

"He Who DOES..."

Studying 2 Timothy 2 recently, I was struck by all the action words in this chapter, all the things Timothy was told to DO: commit (v. 2); endure (3); consider (7); remember (8); remind (14); charge (14); shun (16); depart (19); flee (22); pursue (22); avoid (23); correct (25). And then the things he was told to BE, which also involves some DOING: "be strong" (1); "be diligent" (15); "be gentle to all, able to teach, patient."

Granted, it's not the most advanced form of Bible study, but when studying the New Testament letters, especially the more practical sections, let's make sure we clearly identify the rules, the admonitions, the commandments—the things God tells us to DO. Some will be

explicitly stated (as in this chapter), others implied, but whichever the case; let's make sure we don't miss them.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who DOES the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

“But be DOERS of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:21).

Lessons from the House of Mourning

Having recently gone to “the house of mourning” (Eccl. 7:1-4), one lesson in particular stood out this time: One individual touches many lives, and that certainly includes those we might describe as ordinary.

Go to the visitation/funeral and just listen to the comments—especially the ones made by those who had meaningful contact with the deceased. It's really amazing to hear all the different ways in which these people were impacted.

Now, think about all the people with whom you have meaningful contact—at home, at work, at school, in the various organizations/activities in which you may be involved, in your local church, etc. Of course, whatever influence you may have on these people could very well be extended to their circle of influence. It's just hard to comprehend how many lives we each influence.

Bottom line: Lots of folks are depending on YOU! Don't blow it. Influence these people, not just for good, but for eternity. Make a difference, and the best way to do that is to simply serve the Lord faithfully. There's nothing ordinary about folks who lead others to heaven.